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ABSTRACT

Previous analyses of higher education policy in Sweden are addressed to examine the nature of the major tradeoffs between values. In addition, a set of value categories relevant to higher education policy in general is suggested. Values identified as particularly relevant to the analysis of higher education policy are equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability, and efficiency. Higher education admission policy, the geographic location of new institutions, and many nontraditional teaching and learning modes are motivated by values of equality. In addition, the desire to achieve greater equality of status between different institutions and programs was a chief motive behind a 1977 decision to create an integrated system of higher education. In recent years, excellence in higher education has begun to be emphasized and admission regulations have been adopted that will improve the relative standing of applicants with high academic merits While autonomy and the freedom to choose between alternative courses of action has been an important value, the Swedish system is centralized and uniform in terms of decision-making authority. The desire to improve accountability by opening up higher education institutions to various external interests has been most pronounced with respect to undergraduate education. Efforts to improve efficiency in Swedish higher education are also noted. Value conflicts and tradeoffs are addressed, including equality versus excellence and autonomy versus accountability. One specific problem concerns the links between tradeoffs in higher education policy and the more general problem of meritocracy. It is suggested that higher education policy must relate to a broader set of policies vis-a-vis the role and distribution of knowledge in society. (SW)

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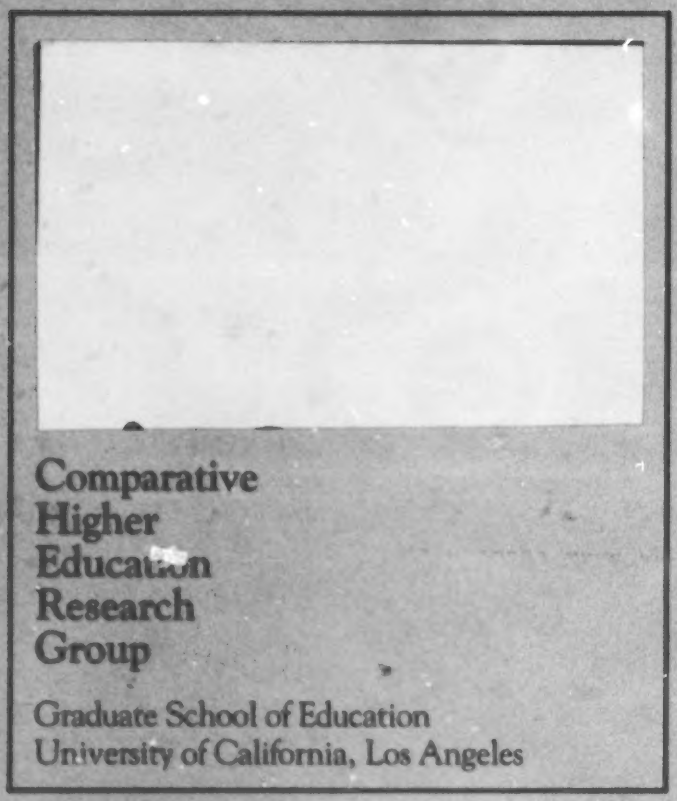

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Working Paper #2

VALUES AND HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

All interesting public policies are the result of tradeoffs between values. Some diversity is always left in the most rigid and uniform policy; some inefficiency will no doubt characterize every policy invented by humans; etc. While values may in a certain dose reinforce one another, or at least not be contradictory, they will inevitably clash at some point when pursued in the extreme. The law of diminshing returns operates in public policy as well as in the marketplace, only in more complex and less understood ways.

Simple as these observations may seem, policy analysts often report their findings as if it could be otherwise. Policy A, they state, is not effective since Objectives X, Y and Z have not been realized in full. To be sure, many of them have in the course of their analyses gained the insight that objectives in public policy are frequently formulated precisely because they promise to reconcile conflicting values and thus transcend necessary tradeoffs. Many of them also point to one major reason why tradeoffs are necessary: the complexity of policy processes where severe time constraints operate, where knowledge is scanty at best, and where the costs of building consensus are often very high.

Still, too often such insights are not the starting point of policy analysis, but the conclusion. Analysis should, in my view, focus on value tradeoffs, both as a general phenomenon and as they vary between specific policy areas. Due no doubt to a misconceived ambition to be value-free, empirical social science has accomplished little in this regard, leaving it for the most part to political philosophers and social commentators. There are exceptions, however, from which we may all learn. First, economists have traditionally engaged in the analysis of value tradeoffs. Typically,

however, and quite understandably, they have concentrated on tradeoffs in the area of economic policy. But in recent years many economists have broadened their interests to include other areas as well. In the process they have made some of the major contributions to the analysis of value tradeoffs in public policy in general.[1)]

Second, there are many relevant contributions from the "social policy" tradition as it has evolved in the United Kingdom in particular, but also in the United States and elsewhere. Scholars in this field have dealt with the nature of value conflicts as they are manifested in real-life, ongoing social policies.[2)]

Finally, individual political scientists such as Brian Barry, Douglas Rae, Charles Anderson, and Charles Lindblom have added significantly to our understanding.[3)] Other social scientists are doing important work as well, particularly with regard to specific policy areas. Undoubtedly, the conspicuous growth of a policy orientation in political and social science since the 1960s has provided a stimulus to the analysis of values and value tradeoffs in public policy. But on the whole, the field has barely been opened yet as an object of sustained and scholarly research. In future efforts toward improving the situation, researchers with intimate knowledge of specific policy areas should ideally team with political theorists in doing analyses of both the general problem of values and public policy and performing studies of area-specific cases. Both roads should be traveled.

In this modest contribution I will draw upon my earlier analyses of higher education policy in Sweden in order to examine the nature of the major tradeoffs in that particular area. Before the Swedish experience is analyzed I will, however, suggest a set of value categories which seem to be relevant to higher education policy in general.

VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

As in public policy there are tradeoffs to be made in the choice of analytical tools. In our case, for example, the use of "basic" values entails the risk of not being able to link these values with real-life policy-making. Put differently, the value implications of particular policy measures may be difficult to trace. If, on the other hand, a laundry list of quite specific values are used, this would severely limit the possibilities of generalization and comparison across policy areas.

In a recent contribution, Burton Clark, (Clark, forthcoming) has suggested that four basi values are at stake in higher education policy: social justice, competence, liberty and loyalty. Actions carried out in order to implement these values are said to "conflict and even contradict one another." While I find his approach basically sound, I shall in the sequel suggest some modifications in terminology and, to some extent, in substance as well.

Clark's first three values should be familiar to students of higher education policy. A change of terminology would, I believe, make them even more so; I suggest that the first two values be labeled "equality" and "excellence". And if instead of liberty we name the third one "autonomy", it too, will have a familiar ring to it. It is probably true, however, that autonomy has a rather specific meaning to some readers; it is important to remember, then, that I use it here in the broad sense of freedom to choose between alternative courses of action.

Loyalty, Clark's fourth value category, seems less obvious to include. By the term, he refers to a complex set of values "that stretches from the limiting of criticism to the linking of the system to national integration and identify." I propose to cast an even wider net, and in doing so adopt a

more common terminology, by suggesting that loyalty be replaced by "accountability". Accountability -- the desire to make higher education responsive to demands in the wider society -- is an oft-discussed theme in the higher education literature.

Finally, I propose that a fifth value be added to the list, namely, "efficiency". Efficiency values support actions which aim at a better (measurable) performance in higher education at a given level of resources or an unchanged performance using fewer resources.

In the following section I will outline the occurrence of these five basic values in Swedish higher education policy. While value conflicts and tradeoffs will be hinted at in the course of that account, I will save a more focused discussion on that topic to a subsequent section.

VALUES IN SWEDISH HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

In reflecting upon the Swedish experience with respect to the five basic values -- equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability, and efficiency -- I have come to realize how frequently particular policy measures are motivated by a plethora of values. A policy decision is not rarely said to further a majority among our five, plus a host of other values. In addition, and perhaps more expectedly, conflicts over policy alternatives are formulated not so much in terms of discriminating basic values -- but, rather, with reference to different conceptions of the same values.

Equality

The last observation is particularly well illustrated by equality. While outright opponents of equality in higher education have certainly been present in the Swedish setting as well, much of the debate has focused on different conceptions of equality. The well-known scale starting with equality of

opportunity and ending with equality of results comes easily to mind. Official Swedish policy has clearly not sought to pursue a full-blown version of equality of results, but it has contained elements associated with that concept. In general, I contend, it has put more emphasis on equality than that of any other industrialized, Western nation. It is perhaps not so much the radicalism of particular policy measures -- similar approaches are with few exceptions found in one or more other countries -- as the comprehensive character of its effort, which makes Sweden stand out in international comparison. The value of equality has affected virtually every major aspect of Swedish higher education (Premfors & Ostergren, Chapter 4; Premfors, 1980, Chapter 6).

Among the obvious instruments in every effort to promote equality in higher education is admission policy. Beginning in the late 1960s, Sweden has developed admission rules which aim at enhancing the opportunities of applicants without traditional academic qualifications from upper-secondary education. From 1977 an elaborate quota system in combination with a numerus clausus covering the entire system of higher education are in operation. While the admission policy contains elements of selection on the basis of "social needs," that feature should not be exaggerated; age and work experience are the important new criteria in selection, modifying the earlier reliance on academic merits (see e.g. Kim, 1981).

The geographical location of new institutions of higher education and a plethora of non-traditional modes of teaching and learning have also often been motivated by values of equality (Premfors, 1980, Chapter 6). In the area of student aid, equality considerations have also loomed large, but few if any features of Swedish policy -- essentially a loans-based system with a small grant component -- stand out in comparative perspective (Woodhall, 1978). Curricular policy has also been formulated with reference to values of equality. Uniformity in courses has traditionally been highly valued in Sweden as in

other centralized systems of higher education. No matter where you take particular subjects, they should be of equal standing in terms of requirements, resources and results. In recent years, this uniformity has actually been relaxed considerably as part of an effort to decentralize decision-making in higher education (see below). However, in another sense equality values have been increasingly applied to curricular policy: the need to tailor courses and programs to the needs of non-traditional groups, particularly working adults, has been stressed repeatedly.

Nowhere is the Swedish pursuit of equality of results in higher education more evident than in what may be termed structural policy. The desire to achieve greater equality of status between different institutions and programs was a chief motive behind the decision in 1977 to creat an integrated system of higher education out of all post-secondary institutions in Sweden. Virtually all of these now form a single system, the so-called hogskolan. The reform was clearly modeled on earlier educational reforms creating a comprehensive system for primary and lower-secondary education (grundskolan) and for upper-secondary education (gymasieskolan). While many other nations display examples of integrated or comprehensive institutions of higher education, or even regional systems of such institutions, Sweden stands out in pursuing that policy on a nationwide basis (Premfors, 1981a).

Excellence

While the value of excellence has certainly been discussed in the Swedish context, it is probably equally true that it has been "crowded out" to an extent which seems to have few parallels in other countries. The kind of high-level rhetoric about the importance of excellence which is so characteristic of academia in many nations has been conspicuously absent in the 1960s and 1970s in Sweden. Some notable exceptions -- such as the former rector magnificus

of Uppsala University, Torgny Segerstedt, and the well-known educationist Torsten Husen (Segerstedt, 1974; Husen, 1975) - only confirmed the rule that not even the primary bearers of excellence as traditionally conceived, the professoriate, engaged in such rhetoric. Instead, they defended their inherited privileges by invoking other values, such as autonomy.

In recent years, however, both rhetoric and (although less so) policy have begun to emphasize excellence in higher education. "Quality" has increasingly become the catchword in public debates over higher education policy. And policy measures have been adopted which clearly point to changing priorities. For example, admission regulations have been proposed and adopted which will improve the relative standing of applicants with high academic merits. For another example, post-graduate education and research are boosted in terms of their share of the higher education budget.

As for rhetoric, the upsurge of concern about "quality" has spread to quarters were little or nothing was heard before. Professors with documented sympathies for the Social Democrats have, for example, cried out loud to deplore what they view as sharply declining standards in universities and other institutions. Even the National Board of Universities and Colleges -- the central agency which epitomized the value mix underlying higher education reform during the 1960s and 1970s -- has expressed concern, and has recently, in characteristic fashion, decided to "deal with the equality issue".

Autonomy

To many proponents of the value of autonomy, the freedom to choose between alternative courses of action should ideally apply to all aspects and levels of higher education systems: individual students, teachers, researchers, departments, institutions, etc. As is well known, the value of autonomy has almost always and everywhere been cherished by academics as a

fundamental prerequisite for the proper functioning of higher education and research. As far as rhetoric goes, the value has no rival in academia. In particular, basic freedoms, i.e., the right to think, write and publish freely, are emphasized. In this respect Sweden has a virtually untarnished record during the last century or more. As it should be, the Swedish universities have been, and still are, a haven for mavericks of all kinds and shapes.

At the same time, however, the Swedish system has been, and still is, centralized and uniform in terms of decision-making authority. Due to its limited size, a long-standing tradition of administrative centralization, and the absence of private alternatives, the system offers little diversity for students and faculty compared to that of many other countries. While many deplore this lack of diversity, virtually nobody seems to recognize the possibility of stimulating private higher education as a means of creating a diversity conducive to the value of autonomy. In the area of student financing, a voucher system has been proposed, but it has rallied little support (Stahl, 1974).

Still, it is true of the Swedish system of higher education as of most others that they operate to some extent in a market-like environment (Premfors, 1980, Chapter 7; also Clark, forthcoming). Potential students are faced with a plethora of alternative study programs and institutions, and students already enrolled have a (limited) freedom to choose between courses. This "consumer market" greatly affects the behavior of departments, institutions, and central planning agencies. Faculty and other staff enjoy some freedom to decide what and where to teach, do research, or administer. Equally important, every part of higher education (well, almost) faces the task of adjusting to an every-changing labor market.

In the area of student choice, "market freedoms" have been frequently

discussed in Sweden. Until the late 1970s, all students with the proper qualifications from upper-secondary schools were able to enroll in the so-called "free faculties" of the universities i.e., most subjects taught in the humanities, social and natural sciences. During the period of exploding growth in the late 1950s and the 1960s, this policy was increasingly questioned. However, all attacks were at that time successfully diverted, often with reference to the value of preserving the freedom of choice for students. As an alternative remedy to cope with the negative features of unrestrained growth, policy-makers proposed a restriction for students to choose between courses once enrolled in the free faculties. A more structured study organization was implemented from 1969 (known as "PUKAS"). In response to widespread criticism -- the most substantive element in the Swedish version of the student revolt of 1968 -- this scheme was, however, watered down to a point where it largely collapsed.

Meanwhile the entire concept of "free faculties" was questioned within the framework of the most important policy-planning commission that Swedish higher education has ever seen, the so-called U68 Commission. It proposed in 1973 that a systemwide numerus clausus should be adopted covering all higher education. Despite temporary setbacks, that policy measure has now been implemented in full (Premfors, 1979a). Formally qualified students now risk not being admitted to higher edcuation at all. So far this has been a minor problem, but a combination of fewer places and a "bulge" in the relevant age groups, will in all probability make it more severe in the near future.

Another area where the value of autonomy has been invoked is, quite expectedly, governance policy. The composition of governing boards has in particular stirred up much controversy. The U68 commission proposed the inclusion of politicians and representatives of the major interest organi-

zations in their membership. To many in academia, students and teachers alike, this represented a severe threat to the traditional autonomy of higher education institutions, and even to basic academic freedoms. Reformers have retorted by pointing to the fact that the new governance policy also implied a considerable decentralization of decision-making power to the institutional level. The dispute illustrates the common situation where disputants talk past each other. Their concepts of autonomy in the context of governance policy differ. While academics -- and among them the professoriate in particular -- have seen their freedom of action seriously curtailed by other interests, both from inside and outside the institutions, national policy has aimed at and essentially succeeded in enhancing institutional autonomy. This has occurred in a number of important areas such as budgeting, curricula and administrative organization (Premfors & Ostergren, 1978, Chapter 6).

Accountability

To use a terminology suggested by Margaret Archer, we may say that accountability in higher education is about the "external transactions" of the system (Archer, 1979). Proponents of the value of accountability wish to see higher education adjust to the requirements of external forces such as the labor market and political authorities. A high degree of political accountability has traditionally been part of the Swedish scene. As an activity funded almost in toto by the state, and ultimately by the taxpayer, and with academics being state employees, virtually nobody has questioned the basic legitimacy of the Riksdag and the Cabinet in determining the goals and structure of higher education. This legitimacy has also covered the size of the higher education budget as well as its distribution between institutions and faculty areas and disciplines. Professorships have, for example, tradition-

ally been created by an act of parliament, and individual appointments of professors is still made in Cabinet. When decentralization zealots have proposed a decentralization with respect to the latter type of decisions, the first to launch protests have, significantly, been -- the professors themselves.

During the 1960s and 1970s Sweden was engaged in a policy-directed effort to affect the pattern of external transactions in higher education. The strategy may be said to have contained two major elements: a streamlining of the organizational framework, and an overhaul of the representative structure of governing bodies at all levels of the system. In the first vein we have already noted that nearly all post-secondary education now forms an integrated system. The guiding principle has been what in Swedish is called enhetlighet i.e., roughly uniformity (but perhaps with less negative connotations). Relatively uniform rules now apply in budgeting, study organization, composition of governing boards, admission, etc. The objective has been to further rational planning and administration by making the system and its constituent parts more comprehensible to both central policy-makers and external interest groups (Premfors, 1981a). While the organization has been vested with considerable power with respect to most operational decisions necessary to carry out activities within the framework of central budgets and regulations.

This decentralization was explicitly made conditional on the second element of the strategy for improved accountability: the reform of representation. Sweden, belonging to the "Continental tradition" of university governance, had before 1977 no representatives on governing boards from outside the institutions themselves. Indeed, before the late 1960s, when students, non-professorial faculty and union representatives were given seats, only full professors were eligible (Ruin, 1979; Lindensjo, 1981). Now,

however, the professoriate has a relatively feeble representation since they have been joined by politicians, trade union representatives, representatives of the national federation of employers, other faculty and students. The relatively strong representation of "corporate interest groups" is today an important feature of Swedish government and politics as a whole. But in higher education a series of general motives were strengthened by a desire to affect the external transaction between institutions and the labor market. At the middle level of institutions this is manifested through the inclusion of representatives of the relevant areas of working life in the so-called program committees, where they make up one-third of the total membership. The idea is, of course, that these representatives will guarantee a constant influx of labor market considerations into the continuous reform of curricula, the study organization, etc. The representation of "all relevant interest groups" will also, it is believed, safeguard against "extremist" solutions to problems.

The desire to improve accountability by opening up higher education institutions to various external interests has been most pronounced with respect to undergraduate education. So far research has been much less affected by governmental policy although many indirect impacts have been inevitable. However, the need to make research more accountable has been repeatedly stressed, and recently a government ad hoc commission proposed several measures which would provide for closer links between research in higher education and external interests in both government and private industry.

Efficiency

To measure the output of higher education seems simple at first glance. Many aspects of it can be expressed in quantities such as the number of

students, teaching hours, degrees, etc. Many are the efficiency experts who have invested considerable labor in attempts to reach the desired goal of creating a production function for higher education. The truth is, of course, that this could only in a very superficial way contribute to the evaluation of activities in higher education. Many tasks in higher education are extremely complex and long-term in character. Often only a very limited number of peers can judge the merits of a certain activity. The level of consensus with respect to both overall goals and more specific objectives is notoriously low among faculty and students. The interest and competence with respect to more mundane administrative matters is probably comparatively low as well. In short, the efficiency expert tempted by the many quantifiable aspects of higher education will soon find himself in a quagmire of complexity and dissensus.

Alarmed by a combination of exploding student numbers and steadily increasing attrition rates in higher education, Swedish policy-makers resorted in the 1960s to the counting of degrees as a measure of performance. Since a numerus clausus was, as we have seen, not yet on the policy agenda, they devised a strategy which combined a rationalization of the study organization with the use of educational technology. This would effectively, they hoped, bring both costs and attrition rates down. What happened is instructive for those who believe that efficiency values apply easily in higher education. The almost euphoric excitement over educational technology was in practice only shared by a small number of central policy-makers and a number of zealots within institutions. This excitement died almost overnight in the early 1970s, no doubt aided by the dramatic slackening in student demand for higher education experienced in Sweden in those years. As for degree counting, research on students' ambitions showed that a large share among them had in fact never intended to pursue a full degree. So at

least from a consumer perspective, attrition rates were consequently a deficient measure of efficiency.

Forced to concentrate on input measures, efficiency experts in Sweden have also proposed that faculty working hours be controlled. In the early 1970s, analysts working for the Swedish Riksdag suggested that teachers and researchers should spend a certain portion of their days in their offices. Why should they have special privileges not accorded other government employees? Fortunately for Swedish academics, and probably for the quality of their work as well, nothing became of the proposal.

The most sustained effort to improve efficiency in Swedish higher education has been undertaken by the National Auditing Bureau. The NAB is responsible for the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness in all central government in Sweden. During more than a decade it has had a specialized unit for higher education and research. Close to fifty projects have been completed in the area, ranging from very limited analyses to studies covering basic functions in higher education performed in all institutions. Although one can clearly discern a trend from a simple to a complex concept of efficiency in the work of the NAB, it is still true that it epitomizes a concept which is shared by few in academia; it is regarded as overly simple considering the complexity and long-term character of higher education.

Although less optimistic about its simplicity, the NAB still seems to aim at some kind of production functions in higher education. In this they have few supporters at present. This does not imply, however, that the efficiency issue is dead and buried outside the NAB. Continued reports on high levels of student failure, now particularly in postgraduate education, the widespread conviction both inside and outside academia that the quality of work is deteriorating, and the financial retrenchment in higher education

and elsewhere, will no doubt keep it alive, perhaps even increase its salience during the ensuing years. National policy-makers, as well as many in academia are currently convinced that there is fat to cut in the bureaucracy at all levels of Swedish higher education. A committee composed of MPs has been given the task to prove possibilities in this area. In addition -- but here they will probably fail to get the support of most academics -- recent research has shown that the number of teachers has increased sharply compared to the number of students during the 1970s; so there might be cuts to be made here as well (cf Lane and Stenlund, 1981a and 1981b).

VALUE CONFLICTS AND TRADEOFFS

Our five basic values -- equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability and efficiency -- make up ten pairs of potential conflicts, and thus in our perspective an equal number of necessary tradeoffs. However, some pairs are undoubtedly of greater interest than others. In the literature on higher education policy, two value conflicts stand out: equality vs. excellence and autonomy vs. accountability. One obvious reason for this is that each of these pairs represents, to an important degree at least, different positions along the same dimension. This seems particularly true for autonomy vs. accountability. They are both answers to the fundamental question of who shall decide in higher education. They serve to support conflicting views concerning the distribution of authority. In the case of equality vs. excellence the conflict is less direct, partly because the concepts themselves are usually more muddled.

In the sequel I will comment most extensively on the two value conflicts deemed most important -- equality vs. excellence and autonomy vs. accountability -- but I will also illustrate the nature of tradeoffs between some of the other pairs of values.

Equality vs. Excellence

Excellence comes first. Even in Sweden. If that statement seems to contradict what was said earlier about past and current Swedish policies, we must remember that higher education everywhere (perhaps China during the cultural revolution was an exception) is basically a sorting mechanism on the basis of excellence. Swedish policy is best viewed as a limited attempt to infuse equality values into a system where meritocratic values predominate. A range of policies -- regarding admission governance and structure in particular -- have modified the dominant position of excellence. Students with lower academic merits are taking places from students with higher merits; laymen are deciding matters which were traditionally reserved for academic expertise; and financial resources are allocated more evenly throughout the system than proponents of excellence would prefer. If the sole objective had been to pursue the highest attainable excellence in selected parts of the system, then Swedish policy is clearly less than optimal. A tradeoff has been made between equality and excellence.

While few would dispute this basic conclusion, two reflections may be added which makes the nature of the tradeoff more complex. The first pertains to the meaning of excellence. The concept of excellence is far from self-defining. If anything, apart from a growing concern, is revealed by the decent debate on "quality" in Swedish higher education, it would be that we are dealing with a muddled concept. Participants have rarely agreed on the scope of the concept; their definitions vary systematically with their basic ideas concerning what higher education is all about. In particular, an important rift is found between those who adhere to a concept of excellence or quality which is "internal" to higher education, and those who prefer a broader meaning. However, one need not muddle the concept to an extent where it becomes meaningless (a great temptation for staunch proponents of equality)

to realize the importance of a shift in meaning for the dilemma of excellence vs. equality. Consider, for example, the tension between a concept of excellence which emphasizes the needs of the traditional disciplines and another which stresses future job requirements. While these may in rare instances coincide, they typically clash in practice. In the Swedish context, recent government policy has been tilted towards a concept of excellence which increasingly emphasizes future job requirements. It is interesting to note, then, that this has been true of the pursuit of equality as well. The best illustration is provided by the new admission rules which directly reward applicants with work life experience, and only indirectly may be said to further equality in social class terms. Empirical research seems to indicate -- although it may be too early to tell -- that the impact of the new admission policy on social equality will be slight indeed.

Expressed differently, the tradeoff between equality and excellence in Swedish higher education policy has occurred in the context of a marked development towards "vocationalization." In the process the meaning of both concepts has been modified. I would be prepared to venture as a general hypothesis, and as my second reflection on the nature of the tradeoff between equality and excellence, that whenever they are seemingly reconciled there is in practice a tradeoff through shifts in the meaning of the concepts. John Gardner's classical treatment of the subject may illustrate the point; by using a concept of equality which is largely "meritocratic" in nature, he is able to avoid an explicit tradeoff situation (Gardner, 1961).

Autonomy vs. Accountability

While academics tend to define autonomy as freedom from government intervention, they act in practice as if they grasped the dual nature of any concept of liberty or autonomy. That is, autonomy defined as freedom of

choice between alternative courses of action may be furthered not only by the elimination of constraints in the form of government or other external regulations but also by adding opportunities -- for example in the form of additional financial resources provided by government. To be poor and ignored is not to be free. A guaranteed flow of taxpayers' money may, provided that not too many strings are attached to it, make up a good basis for autonomous action in higher education.

In other words, far from all government measures should be seen to imply a threat to the value of autonomy. This said, there is little doubt that the emphasis on formal accountability in Swedish higher education has impaired autonomy. The freedom of choice for students and faculty has been deliberately limited to steer their behavior towards desired goals. The uniformity of a relatively centralized formal organization has been consistently preferred to the diversity associated with "market solutions." A highly rationalistic belief in the possibilities of regulating the external transactions of the higher education system has motivated interventions where most comparable countries have refrained from action. These ambitions have been, as we have shown, tempered by an effort to decentralize operational decision-making in higher education. While this has partly occurred from necessity -- it has been a means to cope with the increasing complexity of the system -- it has also been based on an explicit "constitutional philosophy." Since central authorities should not (and partly cannot) regulate higher education in detail, policy-makers have agreed, local decision-making bodies should be structured so as to produce desired outputs. By balancing various interest groups, both external and internal, the proper coordination will result.

This policy, with its emphasis on formal participation by "all affected interests" entails, however, the risk of deadlock and unduly cumbersome decision-making. Participation breeds bureaucracy as well as attempts to

circumvent formal governing bodies in the interest of efficiency (Premfors, 1981b). Such tendencies are clearly at work in the reformed Swedish system. In many areas, I contend, the desire to promote accountability has become counterproductive. The recent proposals toward a more formalized system of accountability in research seem particularly ill-founded. They are based on much too simplified analyses of the relations between research activities in higher education and external forces and, in addition, contain too optimistic beliefs concerning the possibilities to steer research toward desired social goals.

In general, I would argue, it is high time to reformulate parts of Swedish higher education policy with this guiding question in mind: Where can autonomy be furthered for students and faculty without significant losses in accountability? To be worthwhile, a probe into such possibilities should go beyond the established frame of reference and include considerations of at least a limited use of "market solutions."

Other Tradeoffs

The nature of the tradeoff in the case of the pair equality vs. autonomy seems simple at first in the light of Swedish experiences. The basic function of higher education is to sort students and staff according to criteria of excellence. Since some kind of external intervention is needed to modify this tendency, the end result is often reduced autonomy. No doubt this has been the overall impact of central policy in Sweden, particularly in the areas of admission, governance and structure. Complexity is added to this simple tradeoff situation by the observation concerning the "two faces of liberty" made earlier. Student aid is a good example. Here government intervention may enhance the freedom of choice of students. In my view this instrument has been underutilized in Sweden as a means to further equality. Swedish admission policy may illustrate a situation where a gain in oppor-

tunities for one group is traded for a loss in autonomy on the part of another. The emphasis on work life experience has implied increased opportunities for working adults and this has been paid for by young applicants.

True believers in both autonomy and excellence have difficulties in finding the tradeoff point with respect to the pair autonomy vs. excellence. No tradeoff is necessary, they argue, since autonomy breeds excellence in higher education. I think they are wrong in an important respect. The pursuit of autonomy (in the sense of few governmental regulations) will in real life lead to a steep hierarchy in higher education systems, and this will effectively prevent mobility. A huge reserve of talent will consequently get stuck in the lower echelons without any realistic hope of making it to the top. The U.S. "system" of higher education is, I contend, a good illustration of this situation.

Again, staunch supporters of equality and accountability see little need for a tradeoff in the case of the pair equality vs. accountability. It seems worth reminding, however, that strategies of accountability are not always conducive to the pursuit of equality. The Swedish policy in this regard has implied, as we have seen, a consistent effort to infuse labor market considerations into higher education. From statements made by many reformers, one gets the impression that this can largely be equated with the pursuit of equality. This would only be true, of course, if the labor market was significantly more permeated with equality than higher education. This is at least doubtful. Essentially, status differences in higher education are but reflections of the status hierarchy in the wider society, particularly the labor market. To open up higher education institutions to influences from the labor market is certainly to enhance the position of existing values in that setting. While this will perhaps effectively promote "vocationalization," its effects on

equality are dubious at best.

As a final illustration of tradeoff situations in Swedish higher education policy we may choose excellence vs. efficiency. The complexity of higher education cannot be caught in cost-benefit or similar formulas without a severe distortion of the aims of teaching and research. It is a well known observation in organizational analysis that even efficiency formulas which are meant to be partial and used with caution tend to pervert incentive structures (e.g., Etzioni, 1964). Students and faculty in higher education will, like the proverbial Soviet industrial managers, go after what is measured. If, for example, resource allocation is strictly decided on the basis of student numbers or the number of graduates, these numbers will be inflated, often at the expense of efforts which would genuinely promote excellence.

* * *

Needless to say, the above analysis of tradeoffs between basic values in higher education policy, using the Swedish case as a starting point and an illustration, is highly preliminary. The comments made on some of the value conflicts testify to the difficulties involved in this type of analysis.

One specific problem, which I have so far avoided to discuss systematically, concerns the links between tradeoffs in higher education policy and the more general problem of meritocracy.

TRENDS TOWARD MERITOCRACY

By meritocracy in a modern setting I mean the rule of the highly educated, the certified experts, the professionals with the proper credentials from universities and colleges. The concept not only refers to these experts as individuals, but to their expertise as well. In theory at least, it is

perfectly possible to have a situation where the experts do not occupy formal positions of power, but where their knowledge reigns. While the idea that the most knowledgeable should rule is at least as old as Plato, history has probably never seen a "pure" meritocracy. Perhaps China during and after the Sung dynasty (960-1127 A.D.), with its Mandarins chosen on the basis of formal examinations has come closest (see e.g., Hucker, 1975).

In today's post-industrial societies, however, we are in my view heading rapidly toward meritocracy. Governments as well as private organizations are becoming increasingly dependent upon the certified experts and their expertise (Bell, 1973; Gouldner, 1979). Science and social research are brought into decision-making processes everywhere. Their once esoteric languages are now heard in debates over most important public issues. At least in the case of social research, this rarely means that research findings are decisive in the sense of providing "objective" knowledge settling disputes. Rather, its impact is long-term and subtle, affecting overall frameworks and problem conceptions in public policy more than specific decisions (Weiss, 1980, Chapter 1; Premfors, 1979b).

The trend towards meritocracy is present in both capitalist and communist settings. In both types of systems, a "new class" of knowledge workers is growing in numbers and influence (Gouldner, 1979). Socialist thinking has never, despite its anti-elitist bias in socioeconomic terms come to grips with the problem of meritocracy. Indeed, it may be argued that at least Marxism-Leninism is particularly conducive to developments toward meritocracy (Lindblom, 1977, Chapter 19).

The development of higher education from elite to mass systems represents a key element in this process. Substantial shares of relevant age groups (varying from some ten percent in the United Kingdom to close to half in the United States) are now receiving some sort of higher education. But equally

important in terms of its impacts on society is the research performed in universities and other institutions of higher education. It is not true, despite frequent claims to the contrary, that experiences from such institutions produce a common political-ideological outlook in terms of the traditional left-right dimension. Neoconservative critics of the "new class" phenomenon often hold the view that virtually all "intellectuals" in all times have adhered to leftist ideas (Sowell, 1980; Bruce-Briggs, 1979). Daniel Bell -- himself essentially a neoconservative -- has effectively shown the significant limits to that generalization (Bell, 1979). And survey data concerning the American professoriate portray them as moderates, with the interesting exception of professors in the humanities and the social sciences, especially in elite universities (Ladd and Lipset, 1975).

Rather than producing a common ideological outlook in terms of the left-right scale, higher education institutions seem to inculcate in students and faculty a common view on the role of knowledge in society. This view not only implies a high valuation of knowledge in general, but it contains a preference for "scientific" knowledge i.e., knowledge gaining legitimacy by being produced by certain people in certain settings and with the use of certain methods. Other forms of knowledge are in general viewed as inferior.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction it was argued that policy analysts should more than heretofore focus on the study of value tradeoffs in public policy. This work should include both analyses of the general phenomenon and case studies of specific policy areas. The analysis I have provided of Swedish higher education policy from the perspective of value tradeoffs has, of course, essentially been a case study. However, two features of it have hopefully served to enhance its general relevance. First, the values identified as

particularly fruitful to the analysis of higher education policy -- equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability and efficiency -- are sufficiently "basic" to be applicable to other areas as well. Second, I have tried to indicate how higher education is linked with the very broad and extremely important set of tradeoffs encountered in the context of what was referred to as the general problem of meritocracy. The most pertinent policy conclusion stemming from the above analysis is, then, that higher education policy must relate to a broader set of policies vis-a-vis the role and distribution of knowledge in society, a "knowledge policy" if you like (Bergendal, 1981). In our increasingly meritocratic societies we cannot pretend as if the nature and distribution of knowledge, especially that created and disseminated through higher education and research, are not vital policy issues. The difficulty of identifying the character of the tradeoffs involved provides no valid excuse for not trying.

NOTES

1) Good examples of contributions by economists are Arthur Okun, Equality and Efficiency, The Big Tradeoff (1975), and Thomas Sowell, Knowledge and Decisions (1980). See also a number of articles in Ryan Amacher et al (eds.), The Economic Approach to Public Policy (1976).

2) For a recent example, see Jean Hardy, Values in Social Policy, Nine Contradictions (1981). Maurice Kogan, Educational Policy-Making (1975) is a good application to a particular policy area.

3) Brian Barry and Douglas Rae, "Political Evaluation" (1975); Charles Anderson, "The Place of Principles in Policy Analysis" (1979); and Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom, Politics, Economics and Welfare

(1953 are contributions by prominent political scientists.

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